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Dr. S. P. Rajguru



## COLONIAL ASPECTS IN SHAKESPEARE'S 'THE TEMPEST'



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### ABSTRACT

'The Tempest' is believed to have been written by Shakespeare late in the Year 1610 and is regarded as Shakespeare's last complete play. One of the pleasant characters of the piece is Gonzalo, the witty and loyal courtier. There is nothing heroic about him. He would not refuse to carry out the design against Prospero and Miranda which was entrusted to his execution, but made a compromise with his natural Kindness of heart by doing them a timely service and the same kindness is seen in his efforts to comfort Alonso. Forgiveness and freedom are the keynotes of the play and Gonzalo is an honest old counsellor who cherishes the dream of republic. His dream of Republic comprises of establishment of an ideal society. A society in which there would be no work to be done by anybody, and in which there would be no industry, no agriculture, no crime, no wealth and no poverty. Further in his Republic there would be no need for the use of swords or daggers or guns or any other weapons of war. All the men and women would be idle, and the women would be innocent and pure. There would be no sovereignty. Gonzalo's description of his ideal Republic is certainly absurd.

**KEYWORDS** :Republic, Gonzalo, The Tempest etc.

### INTRODUCTION

'The Tempest' reminds us of two great Elizabethan movements – travel and colonisation. For years past English sailors had been exploring the globe. They brought home wondrous trophies – Indians, Monsters and the like and still more wondrous tales of their adventures .Companies like the

Virginia were formed, Charters granted and expeditions sent out to plant settlements in far lands. And innumerable narratives of travel and descriptions of unknown countries were printed. Travel leads to Colonisation and the nation was busy with schemes for plantations in Virginia and elsewhere. Surely in Gonzalo's words on the plantation of this isle and the true form of 'Commonwealth'. We have an echo of what men were saying about these new settlements, their forms of government and social institutions.

We first meet Gonzalo in the very opening scene when Alonso's ship has been caught in a storm and when it seems that the ship would go down to the bottom of the sea. But with his wit and also with his capacity to face a possible catastrophe calmly and with courage, Gonzalo saves the life of the boatswain and also of the passengers. Later in act II scene I, we find Gonzalo trying to offer comfort to Alonso who is feeling deeply grieved over the supposed death of his son Ferdinand. Here Gonzalo shows his loyalty to his king and his solicitude about the king's welfare. While Sebastian and Antonio feel absolutely unaffected by Alonso's grief, Gonzalo takes pain to console and comfort the king even though the king is in a disconsolate mood.

In fact, Gonzalo tries all sorts of methods to relieve Alonso's distress. For instance, he says that there are people in the world who may have suffered even greater misfortunes than the misfortune which Alonso and his companions have suffered. Next, he explains his dream of an ideal republic. He says that if he were the king of that island, he would establish a society in which there would be no industry, no agriculture, no crime, no wealth and no poverty. He further says that in his commonwealth there would be no need for the use of swords or daggers or guns or any other weapons of war. In his commonwealth all the men and women would be idle and the women would be innocent and pure. In this commonwealth, says Gonzalo, there would be no sovereignty.

Gonzalo's description of ideal commonwealth is certainly absurd; and critics have poured scorn upon this description. In the play itself Sebastian and Antonio make fun of Gonzalo for having described a kind of commonwealth which is not at all a practical proposition. Actually, however, Gonzalo is not giving his listeners a description of a commonwealth which can really be established. It is not Gonzalo's purpose seriously to define an ideal state. He is merely trying to divert Alonso's attention from his grief by means of a description which is intended to amuse the king. Some critics have taken this description to be a serious attempt at defining an ideal state, and some of them have gone so far as to suggest that this description is a satire on communism or socialism.

In s play's dramatic personae, we are told that Gonzalo is an "honest old counsellor of Naples." He is travelling with the king's party when he is shipwrecked with other passengers on Prospero's island. The thing to know about Gonzalo is that he is really a good guy with an optimistic outlook on life. When Prospero was booted out of Italy and set adrift with his infant daughter, Gonzalo was the one who made sure Prospero had enough food and water to survive. Gonzalo didn't just make Prospero had enough food and water to survive but also made sure Prospero had fancy linens and books, the kinds of things that would keep a guy like Prospero comfortable.

Ever the optimistic Gonzalo's response to being stranded is to make a big speech about how things would be if he ruled the isle. Shakespeare cribbed Gonzalo's speech from Montaigne's famous essay of Cannibals (1580) where the Brazilian Indians are described as living at one with nature.(Brazilian Indians ) have no kind of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no intelligence of numbers, no politic superiority, no use of service, of richness or of poverty, no contracts, no successions, no occupation but idle, no respect of kindred but common, no apparel but natural, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corn or metal (from John Florio's 1603 English translation). At a time when Europeans

were running around calling natives in America, 'Savages', Montaigne suggests that the Brazilian Indians live a utopian lifestyle while European colonizers are the real barbarians. So its interesting that Shakespeare puts this speech in the mouth of one of his characters. Does this mean that Shakespeare endorses Montaigne's ideas about new world inhabitants. Maybe, Gonzalo, after all is the play's ultimate good guy. 'The Tempest' is believed to have been written by Shakespeare late in the year 1610 and is regarded as Shakespeare's last complete play. One of the pleasant characters of the piece is Gonzalo, the witty and loyal courtier. There is nothing heroic about him. He would not refuse to carry out the design against Prospero and Miranda which was entrusted to his execution, but made a compromise with his natural kindness of heart by doing them a timely service and the same kindness is seen in his efforts to comfort Alonso. Forgiveness and freedom are the keynotes of the play and Gonzalo is an honest old counsellor who cherishes the dream of Republic. His dream of Republic comprises of establishment of an ideal society. A society in which there would be no work to be done by anybody and in which there would be no industry, no agriculture, no crime, no wealth and no poverty. And there would be no sovereignty. But Gonzalo's description of his ideal Republic is certainly absurd.

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